



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



An etching by Jan Luyken illustrating Luke 16:1-9 in the Bowyer Bible, Bolton, England.



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

### *Prayer for Generosity*

#### *St. Ignatius of Loyola*

*Eternal Word,*

*only begotten Son of God,*

*Teach me true generosity.*

*Teach me to serve you as you deserve.*

*To give without counting the cost,*

*To fight heedless of wounds,*

*To labor without seeking rest,*

*To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward*

*Save the knowledge that I have done your will.*

*Amen.*

**Catholic  
Faith, Life  
& Creed**

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Breaking Open the  
Word worksheets  
connect with *Catholic  
Faith, Life, & Creed*  
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by  
TeamRCIA.com and  
PastoralPlanning.com.

## Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.
- ▶ All three readings today are a call to repentance and conversion.
- ▶ All three readings today also refer to stewardship. The Gospel highlights the proper approach, attitude and use of money that Christians should adopt. The liturgy invites believers to embrace their God-ordained responsibility toward the poor.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

### First reading: Amos 8: 4-7

- ▶ Disciples of the prophet Amos are probably the authors of the book bearing his name. Their intention was to record his prophetic utterances for the sake of future generations.
- ▶ The prophetic book was written in the southern kingdom, Judah, probably after the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel @ 722 B.C.E.
- ▶ Amos was a dresser of sycamore trees from the nomadic community called Tekoa. Amos was an outdoorsman. The images and metaphors he used to describe the spiritual life reflect his love of nature.
- ▶ Amos left Judah to address the immanent invasion of the northern kingdom. Amos called for repentance in the face of sure defeat. He insisted that the situation they faced was a result of Israel's sin. They must repent of their unfaithfulness to God.
- ▶ Amos spoke with profound authority.
- ▶ Amos not only addresses the sins of the people of the northern kingdom Israel, he uses the situation to address the sin of Judah in the south as well.
- ▶ Amos insists that Israel's defeat is punishment for its sins against God's poor ones, for immoral behavior, for improper cultic practices and for rejecting God's prophets (Ch 2:6-12).
- ▶ Amos was calling on God to bring swift judgment against Israel for its refusal to honor the demands of justice and its spiritual commitments.
- ▶ The people were incredulous. They naively believed they were in good standing with God. They were dripping in self-righteous denial.
- ▶ They arrogantly believed that God (*they*) would be victorious as the *day of the Lord* came crashing down upon their enemies.
- ▶ Amos was stunned. How could they expect God's intervention in the face of blatant arrogant refusal to live the covenant?
- ▶ Amos was explicit in his condemnation. The rich of Israel oppressed the poor and took advantage of their vulnerabilities. The Sabbath was not respected and

honored as it should have been. Business concerns took precedence over the Sabbath. The rich lived well while the poor barely survived.

- ▶ Amos prophesied that God's judgment was close at hand. It was time to repent.
- ▶ Jewish understanding of reciprocal covenant relationship with God meant that the poor would be cared for; such care was a response to God's covenant relationship with his people.
- ▶ Disciples of the Lord are to be attentive to the needs of the less fortunate-- widows, orphans, the poor and oppressed.
- ▶ When such care is lacking, those who refuse to provide it are in serious breach of the covenant between God and his people.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ If Amos were living today what would he prophecy/preach to the people of our country?
- ▶ Do you believe that God causes war as a punishment for sin?
- ▶ Jesus insisted that God does not cause sickness and death as punishment for sin. Human beings very often bring calamities upon themselves. However, God does use such events to invite conversion and repentance. From what do we as a people need converting? What obstacles are there in our life to keep us from seeking such repentance?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about our response to the poor and oppressed in our midst?

## Second Reading: 1 Timothy 2: 1-8

- ▶ Timothy is considered one of the pastoral letters. It is believed to have been written by a disciple of Paul who wrote the letter to keep Paul's message alive after his death.
- ▶ It was a customary practice to write such letters in the name of the master they were emulating with the idea of writing what they thought the master himself would write if he were alive.
- ▶ The letter seems to be written to a mature, fully established Christian community with clearly defined roles of leadership.
- ▶ The letter chastises those in the community who have fallen prey to gnostic practices and tendencies.
- ▶ Gnostics believed they possessed special knowledge that set them apart from others in the community. The letter addresses gnosticism and what should be a



person's approach to Christ.

- ▶ The letter insists that salvation is open to all—not just a select few. The letter humbly asks that the community prays for those in leadership—to guide them as they lead the community so that it not fall into error.
- ▶ The tensions of the community centered around two poles—the godly and ungodly. Christians without gnostic tendencies believed that godly people are those who promote the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the community. Godly people are those who build up society. They are committed to worship, human values, protection and betterment of society, and faithfulness to home, family, and community.
- ▶ Ungodly people conversely are the gnostics who regard things associated with spiritual realities as good and things associated with human, corporal realities as evil. Thus, human endeavors, regardless if they are for the betterment of society, according to gnostic belief, are considered evil. Gnostics would not be concerned with caring for the community—their only concern was fostering the *gnosis*—the special knowledge—they believed they received from God. For them, the sacraments were not necessary since they had a direct channel to the Divine that others did not possess.
- ▶ The letter also highlights and seeks prayer for ministries within the community.
- ▶ Members are exhorted to pray for their leaders.
- ▶ 1 Timothy reminds the reader that salvation is freely offered to all people by the source of all Truth.
- ▶ Believers are exhorted to pray for the strength to endure no matter what persecution, sorrow or oppression befalls them.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ We may never be tempted to join a gnostic movement such as the one referred to in this pastoral letter, in which members believe they are better than others and possess a special knowledge that others do not possess. Yet there are similar movements alive and well today. Have you ever experienced anyone or a group of persons who communicated a special knowledge of God or a unique giftedness who seemed to lord it over you or others? What is the lesson in such an attitude? What are the dangers of such an attitude?
- ▶ What then are the implications for sharing and witnessing to your faith in Christ? What lessons can be learned from this reading?
- ▶ Share with one other person what you believe in your heart about Jesus Christ.

## Gospel: Luke 16: 1-13

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
  
- ▶ Jesus was a storyteller. He used stories out of the everyday life circumstances of the people to teach the people about the reign of God.
- ▶ Those stories are called parables.
- ▶ The parable utilized common circumstances, situations and social tensions and turned the expected outcome on its end in order to shock, surprise and invite conversion of the listener.
- ▶ The following parable used the situation of the dishonest steward--a common situation in first century communities.
- ▶ First, an unjust steward was discovered and fired. No surprise there.
- ▶ Second, the steward was not put in jail. Herein is the surprise—the hook.
- ▶ Now Jesus had the listener's attention.
- ▶ The unjust steward should have been jailed and his life should have been over, as no one would ever trust him enough to hire him in the future. His future prospects *should have been* hopeless!
- ▶ Yet the customary did not happen.
- ▶ Most the listeners of the parable saw themselves as underdogs in a society ruled by the privileged. They loved stories in which the lowly triumphed since it so seldom happened in real life. By this time in the story such folks would have been cheering for the dishonest steward (his dishonesty notwithstanding)!
- ▶ By drawing from the unexpected Jesus taught the listeners a truth about what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom.
- ▶ To the casual observer it seems as though Jesus is praising the steward for his dishonest, unjust behavior. One must delve further into the story to see what is really going on.
- ▶ This is a story about a good, upstanding master and a not-so-good, not so upstanding steward or property manager.
- ▶ The steward is an agent of the master. He collects rents from the renters for the master.
- ▶ The steward does something dishonest. We are not privy to what that dishonest deed entails.
- ▶ The steward gets caught by the master and acknowledges guilt by his silence.
- ▶ He panics. He knows his situation is tenuous at best. He cannot dig ditches and as the text suggests he is too ashamed to beg. There are few, if any, options left open for him.

- ▶ The steward suddenly realizes that the master did not immediately have him jailed. This tells him that the master is merciful. He will appeal to his mercy and craft his plan accordingly.
- ▶ The steward brings all the renters together and tells them that the rent they owe the master has been reduced. The renters of course believe the master approved the proposed reduction.
- ▶ The renters are ecstatic—they thank and praise the master. He is their hero. They tell everyone of his great kindness.
- ▶ The very clever steward was in a win/win situation. The master would hardly want to tell the renters what the steward had done, thus voiding their windfall and coming across as mean and stingy.
- ▶ Had the latter taken place, the people would have been furious that their good fortune was so fleeting. The steward relied on the master's mercy and generosity.
- ▶ This way, even if the master refused to rehire him, the people would have been so appreciative of the steward's appeal on their behalf that they would have employed him themselves. One way or another, his bases were covered.
- ▶ The dishonest manager capitalized on the master's mercy to redeem his dire situation.
- ▶ Mercy and generosity were considered signs of integrity in that society. Had the master voided the deal made by the steward he would not be seen as a man of integrity, generosity and mercy.
- ▶ The Hebrew Scriptures understood wisdom as an instinct for taking care of one's self. The steward was the epitome of such wisdom. The master therefore rightly called him a wise man.
- ▶ The parable reminds us of God's incredible mercy in the midst of human hopelessness.
- ▶ Human beings are powerless without God.
- ▶ There is no future without God.
- ▶ Only God saves. We are not saved by our own merit. But we must cooperate with the salvation that has been freely given.
- ▶ The steward cooperated with the grace that was freely given—the mercy shown to him by not having him jailed.
- ▶ This is known as a "so much more" parable. If an unjust steward can creatively secure his future by manipulating material wealth, so too should disciples be as creative and use the wealth of this world to build the kingdom. It is an issue of stewardship.
- ▶ The master did not honor the steward for his deceiving behavior. He did, however, [raise him for his ingenuity in cooperating with the grace the master extended to him.
- ▶ Disciples are to trust in God's similar merciful grace.
- ▶ It is important to note that the dishonest steward's solution was not dishonest. He did not charge interest/commission on the principle owed to the master. He used his own commission to cover the difference. (V. 8a).
- ▶ The parable continues its catechism on stewardship. Good stewardship requires the proper use of money and the goods of this world. It begs the question, how

can one be a good steward of the spiritual riches of this life if not attentive to the stewardship of its material riches?

- ▶ Material wealth should be used to promote the reign of God. Wealth was generously shared in those early communities.
- ▶ The bottom line of today's Gospel is trust. We are called to conversion of heart and trust in our merciful God.
- ▶ A sign of our reciprocal relationship with God is the way we use our wealth and resources to promote the reign of God on earth.
- ▶ Wherever the poor are not cared for, the people of God are shirking their divinely ordained responsibility.
- ▶ We can do no less than respond in love to God's generosity to us. How do we respond? We share what we have with those who are lacking.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ In what way have you been a clever steward of God's blessings?
- ▶ In what way is your parish community a good steward of God's blessings?
- ▶ What does the story of the unjust steward teach you about Jesus' relationship with us?
- ▶ What does the parable challenge you to do to more fully live in relationship with God?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in your way of living the challenges of this Gospel?
- ▶ In what way have you experienced God's surprising, incredible mercy in your life?
- ▶ What does this parable teach us about living in the kingdom of God?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.



## APPENDIX

#1. The reading from Amos teaches us that it is not an option or simply a *nice thing to do* to take care of the poor and oppressed. If we want to be God's disciples, then we **MUST** care for the lowly in our midst.

A woman came to our church and used her children to pan handle money. I spent an entire afternoon trying to help her. She asked for money to take a bus for her and her children to New York City. I purchased a ticket for her and took her to the bus station and helped her and her children board the bus.

The ticket taker told me that when I was not looking she came to him and asked for a refund on the ticket because what she really wanted was the money. She had no intention of going to New York. The ticket taker knew the woman. She was an addict and customarily used her children to get the money to support her drug addiction.

My first response was righteous indignation. I took an afternoon of my time to help her and this is how she repaid me—she took advantage of me.

After reflection I realized that my attitude needed adjustment. My response to her should not have been to help enable her drug addiction to be sure. But neither should it have been an attitude of superiority and righteous indignation. She is a child of God and treasured as much as I am treasured. I should have approached her with the attitude, “there but for the grace of God go I.”

My responsibility was to get help for the children and the mother to the best of my ability and let God worry about whether or not she was taking advantage of me. The world took advantage of God's Son. His embrace was large. He did not ask if those he helped were deserving or not—he saved the entire world—saint and sinner alike.

Our/my approach to the poor in our world should be borne out of our covenant, reciprocal relationship with God. We care for the poor because God insists that we do. It is a sign of our love for him.

#2. I was recently at a gathering. A young woman shared how she had been converted to Christ and had become a Catholic. She was very enthusiastic and zealous in her faith. There was a certain air of arrogant superiority when she shared how hard she had tried to evangelize her family but they simply would not be swayed to the TRUTH. Her ardent belief was that unless a person became a Catholic they absolutely would not enter the gates of heaven. Thus, unfortunately only she would be getting in line in front of her parents, her siblings and all wayward relatives who refused the truth.

This well-meaning young woman completely misread or misunderstood Church teaching regarding salvation for people of other faith traditions. No one taught her what the National Statutes of the RCIA tell us that we are not to share the Good News with an air of triumphalism, but rather with one of humble faith. 1 Timothy demonstrates the way in

which we are to share our faith in Christ. Nowhere does the author take the position of negativity saying that all who do not accept Christ are damned. Rather, he upholds salvation in Christ that is open to all.

The danger of gnostic-like tendencies today exist in communities where certain people believe their path is the only path to God. For example, there are those who communicate to others that if one is not a charismatic, they are subsequently doomed. If not involved in Cursillo, one's faith is in vain. If all are not involved in this or that renewal movement one simply has lost their way. All such attitudes emerge out of a fervent desire to share the love of Christ, but it is often misguided. We/I am called to witness to what Christ has accomplished in my/our lives and leave the rest up to God.

#3. Today's liturgy calls for the wise use of resources—good stewardship. Our parish is an example of the creative use of its resources to help the local and global poverty stricken people of the world.

We are a four thousand family parish and we are debt free. We give over a half-million dollars a year to the world's poor. We provided the funds for a clinic in Peru and a school in Haiti. In one weekend we collected \$100,000 for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti and \$80, 000 for the people of the Gulf Coast after hurricane Katrina. We run a social concerns center that provides assistance to poor and homeless people in our area. We house an inter-faith advocacy group to be a voice for the disadvantaged at the state legislative level. We support a school for young, homeless women in Calcutta, India. We help parishioners who are in hopeless situations when we are called upon to do so. We support a Daily Bread center that feeds poor people in our area. Thirty five percent of our children attend our school with some form of tuition assistance. We are a significant contributor to a shelter for homeless women and children. We support outreach programs in Appalachia.

Our parish has an incredible heart for the poor. People take their responsibility to care for the poor, oppressed and lowly very seriously. Ten percent of every dollar received by our parish goes directly to the needs of God's poor people. It is a privilege to serve in such a parish. The parish has been clever stewards of the resources that have been entrusted to it.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Sacrament of Reconciliation  
Stewardship  
Evangelization  
Catholic Social Teaching

Sin and Grace  
Church Structure  
Eucharistic Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The sacrament of reconciliation extends God's mercy and the reconciling presence of Christ to us sinners. Amos calls the people to repentance. As Catholics we are blessed to have a place to bring our sorrow for sin and our desire for repentance—the sacrament of reconciliation in which we experience God's incredible forgiveness and mercy. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.

## STEWARDSHIP

All three readings today refer in some way to appropriate stewardship. Amos chastises the people for failure to be good stewards of God's creation and care for God's poor ones. 1 Timothy exalts the appropriate stewardship of the gifts of the community. And the Gospel highlights the proper approach, attitude and use of money that Christians should adopt. The liturgy invites believers to embrace their God-ordained responsibility toward the poor. Thus today would be a most appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about STEWARDSHIP.

## EVANGELIZATION

1 Timothy is a powerful witness of Christ and the salvation he came to offer all people. We are given an example of how we might similarly share the Good News. Thus, this reading and liturgy invites us to focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Today's liturgy reminds us of God's command that we care for poor and oppressed people in the world. It is not simply a nice thing to do—it is at the heart of what it means to call ourselves Christian. Caring for those who are disadvantaged is our response to the covenant God has forged with us—we can do no less than respond to God's people with love, charity and justice. Today's liturgy is an excellent opportunity to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

## **SIN AND GRACE**

Today's first reading is a reminder that our choices have consequences. Amos preached to the northern kingdom about their refusal to live the covenant. He insisted that the defeat of Israel is a direct result of their arrogance, sin and refusal to live according to the covenant. The Gospel reminds us that God is merciful and is always ready to offer mercy to those who seek it. Today's liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about grace and sin.

## **CHURCH STRUCTURE**

Paul's letter is concerned with the formation of church communities. He is concerned about the life of the community and the path it has taken. He does not mandate a specific form of leadership, but he expects leadership to be in place as indeed it is. Thus, 1 Timothy offers us the opportunity to take a more in-depth look at the Church structure. Thus, today our doctrinal extended session will focus on CHURCH STRUCTURE.

## **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.